The Black Cat

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September 1901

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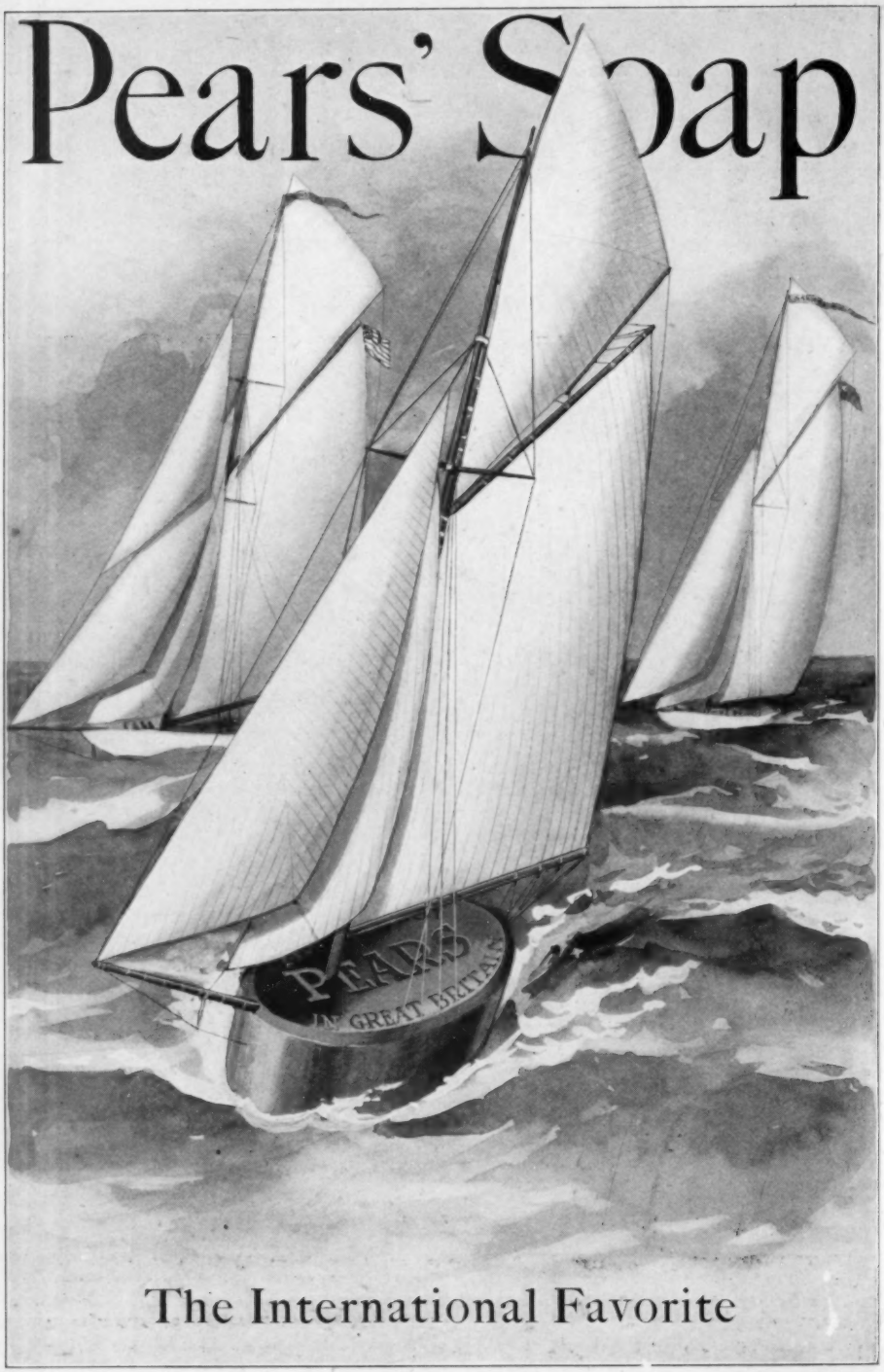
Pears' Soap



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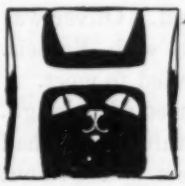
Gentlemen Unafraid.*

BY FLORENCE GUERTIN TUTTLE.



HASTINGS had always been sensitive to atmospheric influences. He had, therefore, not been at Westmoreland twelve hours before he felt the presence of a subtle undercurrent. He divined, too, that he was not intended to fathom it. Whatever the mystery enveloping this old Virginia home, its occupants — two brothers, the last of their race — did not wish to become the means of enlightenment.

The brothers were marked by no peculiarity except a more than fraternal courtesy and mutual devotion. They were men of artistic instincts whom affluence had not enervated nor prevented from cultivating their talents. When weary with work and with being "citizens of the world," they came to this quiet home with its halo of past glory.

Hastings had been sent for as junior member of a New York firm to draw up a will for the elder brother. Oliver Crowninshield, savant and litterateur, had been troubled by a persistent insomnia brought on by overwork. He had produced a book of verse that had the merit of not disturbing the Rialto, while it brought joy to a discerning few.

Francis Crowninshield, the younger brother, was an artist and

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architect. Though abrupt and absent-minded, he possessed the saving quality of drollery which appreciated even his own shortcomings. This was supplemented by a gift of human kindliness which made him a brother to all men. Though cordial in manner, each brother was enveloped in a reserve which generally accompanies a pure strain of gentle breeding. In feature Francis Crowninshield was comely, while Oliver was classic in regularity. In stature they were of the same medium height and build.

Hastings's work was soon finished. His intention had been to make a holiday of necessity and while he was on Southern soil to push "on to Richmond" to visit its scenes of Colonial, Revolutionary and Civil War interest.

His business transacted, he found himself remaining without apparent reason. One day Francis detained him with a sail down the James. The next, Oliver beguiled him in the library with a bibliophile's treasures. The brothers' love of Nature, their knowledge of men and of books, held him enchanted. Oliver was his favorite until opportunity threw him alone with Francis. Then Francis was the man whom his soul had thirsted to meet.

He felt now that these fascinations had been exerted with design. The brothers had deliberately delayed his departure. Why had each, last evening, with thinly-veneered eagerness and without the knowledge of the other, asked him to remain? What was the catastrophe each secretly hoped his presence might avert?

On the morning of the fourth day he went downstairs pondering the motive of his double invitation. In the square hall he stopped to look at the old portraits that lined its walls. The sword had been willingly wielded by the Crowninshield ancestry. Hastings noted the blue and yellow of the Continental uniform, the gray of the Confederacy, and even the red coats of King George. A slight noise diverted his attention. From the hall he could look through a vista into the billiard room. Standing upon a chair in this room Hastings saw Oliver Crowninshield. He had loosened the leather cord stretched across the billiard room to hold the scoring buttons. He now held this cord in his hands in the shape of a noose.

Involuntarily Hastings started forward. At the same time Francis Crowninshield entered the billiard room from an opposite

door. He hurried to his brother and gently took the cord. When he saw Hastings his manner assumed a sudden gaiety.

"Ah, brother!" he exclaimed, "are you trying to tidy the house so early? The critics say that you can make fairly good lines, but you can't mend this one. It hasn't been renewed since McClellan held a house-party here. Would you like to see one of our souvenirs of that stag visit, Mr. Hastings? Observe that door," pointing to one of mahogany, set in the white wainscoating. "Our little brothers of the North were pleased to use its panels for pistol practice. See the bullet holes, if you please. An enterprising manager of a railroad has offered us a comfortable sum to open Westmoreland, which is closed the larger part of the year, to tourists who would enjoy feasting their eyes upon that door. The public, you know, has ever morbidly wished to see the scars and thrust its hands into the wounds."

Hastings felt that Francis Crowninshield's conversation was a subterfuge, yet to cover what he could not say.

"If you are interested in old portraits," Oliver said, breaking his silence as they seated themselves at the breakfast table, "we must tell you the history of some of those in the hall. The man in the ruff, near the fireplace, fought in Bacon's Rebellion. The faded gentleman next to him was once fiery and served under Cromwell. The Stuart portrait is our great-grandfather. He gave Cornwallis a sharp lesson in this section. Our race seems to have been born Dissenters, fearing neither gods nor devils — gentlemen unafraid."

He was called from the room and Francis gave an abrupt laugh.

"Gentlemen Unafraid," he quoted, as he placed his spoon in his grape fruit. "Don't be too much impressed with our venerable valor, Mr. Hastings. The cowards didn't get into canvas, that's all. Posterity, you know, always idealizes. Confidentially, that old gentleman before whom you are expected to salaam was more celebrated for his punch than his punches. His son repaid him by being a dipsomaniac, while *his* issue, our grandfather, developed epilepsy."

"And your father?" Hastings asked.

"Suffered from the sins of his fathers, of course," in a tone which announced that further family communications had ceased.

A smell of burnt leather penetrated the air. Outside a gardener was burning refuse. When Hastings passed the billiard room he noticed that the leather cord had been removed.

As he sat writing letters at an old escritoire in his room, Francis Crowninshield entered. He apologized for his intrusion and then went with his usual abruptness to the heart of the matter that was agitating him.

"Mr. Hastings," he said, "I could see that your suspicions were aroused by the unfortunate scene in the billiard room this morning. I want to tell you the meaning of that scene, and why I have so urgently begged you to remain. Your presence may avert a tragedy. My brother, through overwork, has suffered from nervous exhaustion. This developed into melancholia, which has recently shown suicidal impulse. When I tell you that our father died in an insane asylum you may understand my reason for alarm."

A servant knocked and said Mr. Oliver desired his brother to join him at the stables.

"He does not wish me to be alone with you," Francis whispered after the servant had gone. "Would you mind taking a walk at eleven? Strike off to the left through the woods. I will meet you at the opening near the highway beyond. I must see you. It is asking much, I know, of you, a stranger, to remain, but — "

"Don't mention it, Mr. Crowninshield," Hastings replied, wishing to allay his host's suffering, his sympathies strongly stirred. "I will do what I can for you. Your brother is the gentlest gentleman I have ever met. Your devotion will save him, I know."

"Thank you," Francis Crowninshield said, shaking his hand appreciatively, and quickly left the room.

Hastings's mind refused to concentrate upon his letters. Suicidal mania seemed written upon the page. What a Nemesis to pursue one to whom Fate had otherwise been so generous!

Another knock at the door. At Hastings's word Oliver Crowninshield entered. His dreamy eyes were now alert. Hastings thought that he had never before seen beauty blended with refinement of so high an order in one man's face.

"I — I have something that I must say to you alone, Mr. Hastings," he began with dignity, yet evident embarrassment, "but hardly know how to begin. Do you believe in heredity?"

"Not necessarily," Hastings answered, stooping to pick up a pin to hide his own embarrassment. He would have given his chances of a judgeship to escape this man's self-humiliating confession.

"I asked you to remain at Westmoreland not solely for the great pleasure of your company," the low tones continued, with the soft, fascinating Southern accent. "There is a terrible taint in our family." He spoke slowly. Hastings felt an intense longing to help him — to spare him — but was bound not to speak. "Sometimes this taint appears as violent insanity — sometimes as a mild monomania. Or it takes the form of —" he moistened his lips, "suicidal tendency."

The pathos of the case filled Hastings with a choking sensation. He could not listen to this man's plea to be saved from himself.

"I understand," he said quickly. "I shall write the firm that I shall remain on the James — for the hunting and fishing."

"Thank you," Oliver said, wiping his forehead and pale face. "Otherwise, I fear the most tragic results for — *my brother Francis.*"

Hastings recoiled.

"Your brother Francis?" he echoed.

"Yes," covering his face with his hands. "He is struggling against suicidal mania."

"Good God!" Hastings exclaimed, under his breath.

"You are shocked?" Oliver asked, regaining his composure now that his burden had been delivered. "The view of suicide is purely educational. What we call life may be the real death. The ancients did not consider suicide an evil. The hemlock draught was legitimate. The Stoics practised it. The Jews authorized it in preference to falling into the hands of an enemy. Is not disease an enemy? The Bible has two great suicides, Samson and Saul. Epictetus taught: 'If you do not like your life you may leave it; the door is open.'"

"But surely you do not sanction such a course?" Hastings exclaimed in revulsion.

The iris of the soft brown eyes contracted. Their radii seemed to focus upon Hastings in two piercing points.

"Of course not," Oliver replied softly. "I only wish to tell you that my brother is not alone in believing in the individual

right of exit when interest in the play has ceased. It is always the unsatisfied inquiring intellect that wishes to take this step. Think of the beacon lights of history who have gratified this impulse — Demosthenes, Mithridates, Hannibal — the Carthaginian wore poison constantly in a ring. And there are others too countless to name."

Hastings felt like a man who had been shot twice in the same place. His brain was blurred. He longed to be alone and probe his wound.

"Of course you understand that the suicidal impulse is curable," Oliver continued. Hastings had never before felt so completely the possibility and charm of music in the human voice. "Lord Clive in early life twice attempted suicide. But he lived long afterwards and gained power and fame."

"Clive shot himself at fifty," Hastings corrected.

A swift look of resentment shot over Oliver Crowninshield's face. He was too much in love with his theories — too accustomed to having them accepted — to bear contradiction.

"There comes a time at least once to every thinking being when death is preferable to life," he asserted.

"Yes, when the emotions have been abnormally strained," Hastings argued. "But self-preservation is the first law of life. May you not be mistaken about your brother?"

"You mean because he is sane on every other subject? The desire for self-destruction may be present where there is no intellectual delusion. Moreover, the insane, when watched, will assume a cheerfulness for weeks. Don't you know why I was taking that cord down this morning? It was as a preventive. Last night I found Francis testing a rope made of twisted towels."

Again Hastings recoiled. One of these men was departing from the truth. Hastings realized the horror of his position when he became conscious that he could not determine which one.

When he was free he struck out for the woods. The beauty of the landscape was blotted out by the hideous abstractions of his thoughts. How often he had wished to visit an old-time Southern mansion! How often Fate grants our wishes, but in a form that crushes desire!

He saw Francis Crowninshield sitting upon a bowlder by the

highway. Hastings's first impulse was to tell him of his brother's awful countercharges. Then discretion bade him wait. The habitual instinct of the lawyer suggested that he hear both sides of the evidence. Wisdom must then weigh the testimony and decide which man was sane.

He chose carefully the words that he would say.

"Mr. Crowninshield," he began, "you told me you did not wish your brother to know that you had asked me to remain at Westmoreland. Yet he had already asked me, last evening, himself."

If Hastings had expected this statement to precipitate confusion he was disappointed.

"I am not surprised," Francis replied, his eyes moistening. "It was a pathetic appeal to be saved from himself. He is torn with the old, old conflict of good and evil forces. We cannot tell what superhuman efforts Oliver is making to win."

Hastings leaned against the fence, baffled. "I must retract my word of this morning," he said, trying another tack. He regarded his companion from the corner of his eye. "The case is too serious. I cannot remain. Your brother should be placed under scientific treatment."

"Have you had any experience with insane institutions? The mere presence of those demented would drive him mad."

"Then have a physician here."

"Oliver would resent it. His cunning would only more cleverly outwit us. This is not a case for drugs or surgery, Mr. Hastings. We must 'minister to a mind diseased.' The successful physician of the future must also be a metaphysician. At present I know of none such."

Hastings's eyes turned full and searched his companion's apparently frank features. Could he believe him? Consciousness replied, could he disbelieve him? Then he thought of the other brother's loving solicitude. How could he discredit him?

"Why not try travel?" Hastings suggested.

"And have him jump from a boat or train?"

Hastings shuddered.

"No, all that he needs Mr. Hastings, is careful watching and healthful diversion. I will supply the first. Your presence will offer the second. We will shoot, fish and explore the historic

places in the vicinity. Why should you shrink from remaining?" he demanded resentfully, reading Hastings's thoughts. "You would not have known of this weakness if I had not told you. Does not my brother offer unusual charm as a companion? His trouble is due to temperament as well as taint. Every poet is half mad. Byron said that he expected to die at the top first, like poor Swift. But my brother shall not die!" he exclaimed passionately. His face flushed. His eyes flamed. Hastings saw the pent-up passion contained in this man's nature. Was it the demon that was consuming him? Hastings wondered as he watched the paroxysm pass.

"I have made a study of this subject, Mr. Hastings," Francis continued, controlling himself. "Insanity is divided into two kinds — acute and chronic. Acute insanity is subdivided into general paralysis of the insane, chronic mania," — counting them off on his fingers — "dementia, idiocy, imbecility and softening of the brain."

"For Heaven's sake stop, or I'll have them all," Hastings exclaimed.

"If you are to remain you must understand," Francis said firmly. "We fear only the unknown. Melancholia taking the form of suicidal impulse is curable. At least, so the best authorities assert. Homicidal tendency is not."

"I will remain," Hastings said, as the quickest way of cutting short the conversation. The brothers' mutual knowledge of this dread malady, he felt, confused rather than aided decision.

There was little sleep for Hastings that night. The situation seemed at once so simple, yet so insoluble. The natural method of appealing to the brothers must be rejected. Whichever one he appealed to would, of course, claim rationality. The insane, he knew, always asserted themselves sane. He could only curse his own credulity and the pretender's plausibility. That one of these men was playing a part he felt certain; the motive was to divert suspicion and gain a wider scope for his own action. Hastings's business was to discover which one. Even with heredity, he felt that it was highly improbable that both brothers should have developed the same tendency, showing itself in the same manner and at the same time.

Hastings had retired, but his eyes refused to close. His mental vision faced this improbable problem. Was ever man so placed? In the stillness he heard a sound. The front door below him creaked, as if gently opened. Instinct hurried him to the window before he realized that he had left the bed. A figure was moving across the lawn. It was one of the brothers. The gloom refused to reveal which one. The figure rejected the path and struck out for the river. Hastings's flesh crept, but he reached for his clothes. He must follow and save that life at any personal risk. As he hurriedly dressed, a second figure crossed the lawn. Now it broke into a run. It was the other brother, bent on rescue — faithful by night as well as day.

Hastings strained his eyes through the darkness. If only he might discover which was the pursued, which the pursuer! His presence now was not needed. With a coat thrown over his shoulders he sat down at the window to await results.

Presently, after what seemed an eternity, the woods appeared to move towards Hastings. Then the indefinite black blur resolved itself into two forms. Hastings strained forward. Which one? his mind demanded. Which one? As they approached he saw that the brothers had linked arms affectionately. They were talking now as if taking a customary stroll. There was no evidence of one leading, the other being led. Their cursed courtesy was veneering the tragedy which Hastings believed had been dangerously near completion. Their mutual manner, always so deferential, now seemed exaggerated, as if to baffle truth.

When the front door closed Hastings broke into a profuse perspiration. A weakness followed which showed him for the first time that he had nerves. He resolved to leave Westmoreland in the morning, then fell into an exhausted sleep.

The next morning Oliver Crowninshield found opportunity to whisper to Hastings: "I saved him again last night. The river — he was on the point of jumping in."

Hastings looked at the lustrous, intelligent eyes of Oliver Crowninshield and believed him. It was his brother whose monomania urged him to take his own life.

Half an hour later Francis led him to see an old sun dial that was in the rose garden.

"He tried it again last night," he said simply. "It was the closest call that he has yet had."

Hastings looked at the troubled features of Francis Crowninshield and believed him. It was his brother who was insane. Then he wondered if his own senses were leaving him, since conflicting convictions existed simultaneously in his own mind.

Hastings found that without great rudeness it was impossible to leave Westmoreland that day. The brothers had planned a day for his pleasure — a morning of duck shooting; an afternoon given to visiting historic spots.

In spite of the dark shadow which enveloped him, Hastings spent a red-letter day. No further mention was made of the imminent danger. The congenial charm of the men bound him to them as if by a spell. The fact of their mutual dependence upon him — the knowledge that a blight distorted the vision of one — made its appeal. Hastings responded with an affection more often the result of years of companionship than of days. When the brothers talked of Oliver's nearly completed mediæval romance, Hastings saw that their minds were storehouses of old-world wisdom and lore. Pity replaced revulsion. Duty demanded that he remain. He must find a key to this problem. Its solution must not only solve but save.

The day out of doors had its effect. That night sleep was deep in the household.

The next morning in the breakfast room, before his brother appeared, Oliver Crowninshield lowered his newspaper to say:

"Francis tried to swallow his tongue last night."

"That is absurd!" Hastings exclaimed.

"Of course it is, to a perfectly balanced mind," Oliver replied sweetly. He never lost his equanimity, like Francis. "I could tell you of more ridiculous things than that."

He left the room. At the same time Francis appeared.

"What was my brother saying to you, Mr. Hastings?" he asked eagerly.

"I prefer not to say," Hastings replied.

"Is that quite fair? Considering the exigencies of the case, don't you think we ought to pull together? Last night Oliver left the gas turned on in his room. I discovered it in time."

"Strange that I did not detect it also," Hastings replied.

Francis Crowninshield's impetuosity came to the surface. His face darkened.

"I do not like your tone, Mr. Hastings," he said icily, his eyes burning. "Again I ask you — what did my brother say?"

But they were interrupted and an explanation was impossible for the rest of the day.

That night, when Hastings went to his room to dress for dinner, he received a shock. He had declined the services of the brothers' personal man and reached for his razor to shave himself. Around the case he found a strip of paper. He removed it and read these words: "The maximum of suicides occurs in June. For humanity's sake remain through the month." As he was not familiar with the brothers' handwriting he could not say which hand had penned the note. But when he reached for his razor — *it was gone.*

Strained nerves now declared their utmost tension and apprehension reached its height. Hastings felt that he must recover that blade before he slept and at any cost.

He appeared at dinner in his evening clothes, but unshaven. He made no apologies but searched the brothers' faces to detect which was the thief. Even now one might have the weapon concealed upon him. Hastings shuddered when he thought of the bloody work this night might hold. After dinner he would demand the razor when the brothers were together. The one who produced it would be the guilty man, unless fraternal devotion led each to deny all knowledge of the theft.

He went to his room first for a special brand of cigars. As he passed the dressing table something gleamed in the gas jet's dim light. It was the ivory handle of his razor. Some diabolical agency had read his thoughts and, replacing the razor, had frustrated his dénouement!

He forced himself to return to the billiard room. He found Oliver Crowninshield reading, and Francis chalking a cue. Hastings noted the change in the brothers' appearance in the few days since his arrival. Whichever one was deranged, whichever his brother's keeper, the strain had told alike upon each. Hunted, fearful eyes, deepening pallor and fresh furrows told of great internal disturbance and even of exhausting physical unrest.

"Oliver has reached a second stage," Francis whispered, trying his cue. "Auditory hallucinations. He thinks that he hears voices calling to him. Religious fanaticism is the most dangerous, you know."

"And what have you?" Hastings asked, yet without the scorn his words implied. A sense of brotherhood with these men had supplemented pity. He wished to know only that he might help.

"I have grave fears for his recovery," Francis replied, seriously.

Hastings had almost decided to believe him, when Oliver Crowninshield handed him a book.

"Have you ever been interested in the teachings of Zoroaster, Mr. Hastings?" he asked. "There is much wisdom not unlike our Proverbs, in the Persian Vedas. Yet they probably antedate Proverbs. Take this volume to your room and read some passages that I have marked."

When Hastings was alone he found a note concealed in the book. "F —— says," it read, "that 'when life is unbearable death is desirable and suicide justifiable.' He suggests that we prove together that we are gentlemen unafraid."

Hastings compared the two notes. But the writing was not the same. His mind returned to the razor. It was possible, he thought, that one hand had placed the first note, that another had taken the razor. Suspicion would be thrown, of course, upon the writer of the first message. If the determined man had taken his own razor, the theft would have been discovered by the servant.

What did that last clause in the second note mean? Had the madman an infernal plan to depart this world and take with him his much-loved brother? Did a double tragedy threaten?

Hastings paced the floor and made his plans. The house was isolated. It was too late to reach the nearest town to-night. He would leave at daybreak and report the case to a physician. He could no longer bear the responsibility. His presence seemed to develop cupidity, not to divert attention. He would not again face the brothers' suavity. Whether he wished it or not, the afflicted one should have the advantage of modern scientific treatment. Hastings packed his grip. Then, soothed by his decision, he fell asleep.

In the gray of the morning he was awakened by some one shaking him. He sprang at the dim outline beside his bed. As he grappled with it, he recognized the voice of the brothers' body servant.

"The house is on fire, Mr. Hastings," he said. "Let go and jump from the portico. The lower rooms are ablaze."

Smoke now curled in at the door.

"Your masters?" Hastings asked, as he pulled on some clothes.

"Have been warned. They will escape by the rear."

Hastings stepped out on the portico. Flames belched out of the lower windows, the pillared portico protecting him as he jumped. The man followed, the soft turf breaking the fall.

On the lawn frightened darkies ran about in confusion. A few carried futile pails of water; others, feeble garden hose.

The house had been ignited in many places, though not near Hastings's room. Hastings foresaw its doom.

"Where is Mr. Crowninshield?" he demanded. No one knew.

Hastings ran to the rear. As he reached it, a small chest flew out of an upper window. It broke as it fell, and closely written manuscript scattered itself over the grass.

"Bring a mattress — the ladders are useless," he cried to the herding servants. "Pick up those papers and guard that chest."

A mattress was brought from an out-house.

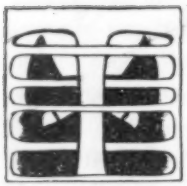
"Hold it," he commanded. Then he threw back his head and shouted to the upper windows. "We are holding a mattress. For God's sake, both of you — *one of you* — jump!"

Two figures leaned out of a topmost window, struggling, persuading, arguing, with arms entwined. One was pleading for life, his own and his brother's. One was in love with death and would not be denied. Hastings tried to fathom the problem in the grayness. But the similar height and build of the men hid the truth.

When neither man jumped, something in Hastings's head snapped. He paid for it later with brain fever. As the flames for the last time showed him the brothers, their arms, no longer struggling, were still entwined. The one who had lived faithful died faithful. When the house fell, a martyr was entombed!

Born Tired.*

BY JAMES D. ELLSWORTH.



THE Pacific Mail Steamship *Peking*, which sailed for Hong Kong last month, carried three hundred and forty-seven passengers of various nationalities. In that whole number there was one, a Chinaman, who left no friends behind, and yet he will be missed, from Maine to California. Ah Wong, the exceptional man among several hundred ocean voyagers, would be exceptional in any community on the face of the globe. He carried with him, in letters of credit, a fortune that will keep him in luxury for the rest of his days, earned without work in a unique profession which he invented himself. He belongs to a race that has long been credited with a peculiar aptitude for ways that are dark and tricks that are vain, but Ah Wong's ways have been so much darker than those of his fellow-countrymen that he is the most cordially hated man that has ever been smuggled over the Canadian border.

Ah Wong is the son of an actor, since dead, who performed in one of the minor theatres of Canton installment-plays that lasted for a month. Ah Wong is also the grandson and great-grandson of actors, and from his earliest youth has shown marked ability in the same line, as he made devil faces at his mother, frightening her half out of her diminutive shoes, before he was a year old. He soon became unpopular with his family, who regarded him as having been born tired, but it was thought that his inherited talents could be counted upon to provide handsomely for his parents in their old age. But disappointment attended their expectations at every step. When the boy was old enough to go to school he began to limp so badly that he had to be carried in the arms of a servant. Soon afterward he appeared to be subject to sudden attacks of blindness, so that all thought of providing him with a regular education had to be indefinitely postponed. Then his father, in his leisure time, undertook to teach him by

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rote the text of the ancient Celestial tragedies, and would harangue at the top of his voice for hours together. It was all breath wasted, for after the first few words Ah Wong's hearing would become blunted, and he would sit in passive somnolence, with a curtain of silence between himself and the noise of talk.

Ah Wong's stomach seemed to be the only part of his anatomy that remained in good working order, and in this the family rejoiced, believing that if his appetite remained good, the time would come when he would outgrow his physical defects.

Many years passed, the actor-father was gathered to his fathers, and Ah Wong, instead of being a prop for the support of his widowed mother, was a troublesome burden. He was now believed to have been born lazy. He was more unpopular than when he made devil faces at her as a baby, so his mother, exercising her right as head of the house, called a family council to sit upon his case. The wise old lady strongly hinted that it might be well to put him out of his misery permanently. Possibly she might have found some one to hold a sword, if he would consent to fall upon it, but the uncles and cousins had another plan. They took up a collection among themselves and with this money Ah Wong was sent across the ocean to America. Doubtless he would be well cared for there, and in any event he would be unable to return.

It all turned out as they had said. Ah Wong was unloaded in Boston from the "underground railway" like a lump of lead. Taken to some distant relatives, he ate their rice, drank their tea and smoked their tobacco for several years, and earned the title of the laziest man in the world. When told that he must go to work he was too lazy to refuse, but somehow he never did the work. When he was kicked out of one store he quietly settled himself in another, and when his distant relatives said disagreeable things, his hearing became dulled so that he was not disturbed. His needs were few and the burden of his food and tobacco was not a heavy one, but his perpetual idleness was a constant annoyance to his cousins, who at last lost patience and began to talk of sending him back to China.

Then the deafness left Ah Wong. He did not want to hear that talk, but in spite of his infirmities he could not help it. With China came thoughts of falling on swords and all that sort of

thing, so he promptly told his cousins that he would soon be able to do something for himself, but he did nothing until Sam Chin got caught pounding a neighbor with a flat-iron and was sure to get six months in the house of correction. Sam Chin could not afford to waste so much time, as it would mean the loss of all his laundry customers. While he was out on bail, awaiting trial, he said that he would rather pay a lazy Chinaman five hundred dollars to go to jail than go himself. With laughs and jeers Ah Wong was advised to apply for the place, and when he gravely nodded his head his cousins laughed till they doubled up like jack-knives. Nevertheless, it was all arranged, though the price was only half of what Sam Chin had jokingly offered.

When the day of the trial came, Ah Wong was in the clothes of the other, the painted face of Ah Wong was like the face of Sam Chin and the deception was not discovered. Ah Wong was pleased with his bargain when the money was paid and securely hidden, for six months is not long in a man's life and he was told that in the house of correction a good bed and plenty of food are provided. He had not been told that Sam Chin's sentence demanded hard labor, and for the first time in his life, to his disgust, Ah Wong had to work. From this work came thought, angry thought at first, but calm and satisfying afterward, because before the six months were up he had invented a new profession.

When released, he asked his cousins to write to New York, San Francisco, Denver, and other cities, to say to the leading Chinamen that Ah Wong would go to jail in the place of other men for not less than a thousand dollars and expenses. His cousins laughed again and said that Ah Wong had learned to work, but he said nothing about his secret invention.

In two months he went to Providence, where Yee Get was arrested with smuggled opium in his jacket. The sentence was a year at hard labor, but when it was interpreted to Ah Wong he only smiled broadly. He did not smile in the jail, but when the time came for him to go to work, he was found all doubled up with some strange disability, and both wrists and one shoulder were out of joint. The doctor reduced the dislocations and sent the prisoner to the hospital to recuperate. The food was better in the hospital, the bed was better, and Ah Wong recovered — as slowly

as he could. When at last he was sent back to work the strange sickness attacked him again and the joints of his arms were again dislocated. He never left the hospital after that, and, as he had become a burden upon the authorities, he was released in nine months, earning his thousand dollars more easily even than he had expected. This time when he returned to his cousins he found that he was wanted in Philadelphia and San Francisco at the same time, and he kept both men waiting until the price was bid up to three thousand dollars. At the beginning of his professional career he was so thin that he could only take the place of laundrymen and laborers in the penitentiaries, but with arms out of joint he lived on the fattest of hospital fare, and as he gained weight he took the sentences of rich merchants who were able to pay more. He permited himself to be tried for any crime, only drawing the line at murder cases, because, as he said, he was now a rich man and could not afford to leave his money.

Last fall he decided that he was rich enough to retire. He had served in twenty jails and as he could not do his contortion specialty in any one of them a second time, his field of usefulness had become restricted to cities where there were but a few, and those generally law-abiding, Chinamen. Therefore he decided to return to the land of his fathers to enjoy the fruits of his laziness, and was planning to reach there in time for the celebration of the Chinese New Year. At the last moment, however, he was summoned to New York by a letter from a man who was about to be deported for being illegally in the country and whose rich friends were willing to pay liberally for a substitute to be sent back to China in his place. The new arrival, then out under heavy bail, was a comparatively thin man, but Ah Wong agreed to take his place for two thousand dollars and reduce his weight till he fitted the other's clothes. So Ah Wong enjoyed the New Year's festival on a starvation diet of rice and water. When, with his snug fortune, he embarked on the *Peking*, his passage paid by the Government of the United States, he was awaited by a patient little almond-eyed bride, secured through the good offices of his repentant family.

The Invisible City.*

BY FRANK LILLIE POLLOCK.

HE bare possibility of the thing, and that it should have culminated in its amazing tragedy in the midst of the enthusiastic throng as the returning regiment marched up Fifth Avenue, staggers the imagination. The soldiers had just reached Twenty-ninth Street when a man who had been standing in the crowd at the south-west corner dropped suddenly into a huddling heap upon the sidewalk. At the same moment, as was afterward remarked, those standing near experienced a peculiar sensation of physical distress, attributed by some to fatigue, but quickly forgotten in the excitement of the spectacle.

A policeman rescued the man, who was supposed to be intoxicated, and extricated him from the crowd. But a single glance into his face was enough to refute the theory of intoxication; he was ghastly pale, with open eyes; his limbs hung like limp strings, and his head waggled helplessly upon his shoulders. An ambulance was called, and the man was removed to the hospital.

He was a short, slight man, of middle age, with black moustache and black, slightly grizzled hair. He was well dressed, and had all the appearance of an American professional man. The most cursory examination showed that the case was one of paralysis of the most complete sort. Not a muscle of the system appeared to be under control, though it was believed that the man was conscious. It was of course useless to interrogate him, and he was removed to a ward and undressed.

The first surprise came with the discovery that he was wearing next his skin a garment of something resembling woven glass, flexible as silk. It recalled the famous World's Fair glass dress, but was much finer in workmanship. This strange coat of mail

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was in one piece and covered the entire body, limbs and feet, but down the back it was split in a zigzag tear.

This remarkable revelation aroused much curiosity, and the man's clothing was searched for some clue to his identity. There was not so much as a visiting card or a notebook — not even a watch or a pencil, but in an inner pocket was found a rather thick packet, wrapped in paper, like a bundle of letters. It was opened, and to the amazement of the attendants revealed a packed pile of thousand-dollar bank-notes — one hundred and seventy-five in all.

The staff immediately concluded that they had a bank robber or defaulter, and communicated at once with police headquarters. But there was no report of any such sum having disappeared. Advertisements were placed in various newspapers without success, except in the assembling of a horde of bogus claimants. Meanwhile the only man who could throw any light on the matter lay dumb and as good as dead upon his cot.

This state of things lasted for two months and a half. Early in April, 1899, the attendants observed a slight but unmistakable return of power to the paralyzed limbs. The improvement continued, but was confined to the left side alone. In a few weeks more, the patient was able to use his left arm feebly, and those around eagerly awaited the day when he should speak.

That day never came; the disease held the larynx fast. In a short time, however, he begged by signs for writing materials, and scrawled painfully with his left hand a series of characters that were wholly undecipherable by the attendants and doctors. Inspection by a linguist proved it to be very crabbed Russian, the translation being simply: "Where is my money?"

It was shown him, to his satisfaction, and a Russian interpreter was engaged. Strange revelations were expected, as a mystery of no common nature seemed involved, but no revelations were forthcoming. The patient made only the most ordinary requests. No language but Russian seemed intelligible to him, and, in view of his decidedly American appearance, it was supposed that this had been his mother tongue, to which the stroke had thrown him back.

But in a few days he took to writing, slowly and with difficulty, for several hours every day, guarding his manuscripts with the

most anxious care. They were kept under his pillow at night, and he was not willing that any one should so much as touch them. But his solicitude was not to be prolonged. His partial recovery had been attended by a dangerous lowering of vitality; his right side was dead already, while the left still lingered. In less than a week, as the house-surgeon was making his rounds, he was startled by a strange, guttural sound from the bed of the paralytic. He hastened toward it with the attendants, but the man had raised himself to a sitting posture, as if completely recovered. His mouth opened, and in a voice of no human sound he exclaimed loudly, "Vive l'Anarchie!" and fell back again — lifeless. The papers crackled under his pillow.

The mysterious patient was buried — a mystery — and the funeral expenses were paid out of his money. The superintendent, who had possessed himself of the dead man's manuscript, sent it at once to a professor of languages for translation. When the English version was returned, he read it; he read it and kept his counsel. Then, the time of his annual vacation approaching, he left New York and told no one where he was going.

First of all he went to Santa Fé, New Mexico. Thence, by horseback, he traversed the mountain trails of the north-western corner of the territory until he arrived at the "Lago de los Demonios" — the Lake of Demons. The water bearing this uncanny name lies in a round, cup-shaped valley, which twenty years ago was green and empty. Few persons ever passed, but one day a band of trappers found the valley two-thirds filled with blue water, and bordered with dangerous-looking blue mud. Their ponies snorted and held back from entering this mud, which was thereupon deemed bottomless. It was not surprising that a cloud-burst or a deflected river should have filled the valley, but it was observed that, however the wind might blow, no wave ever ruffled the surface of the lake. It remained smooth and placid as if it had been a block of solid glass. Game deserted the neighboring hills and horses manifested the utmost reluctance to approach the strange water, so that it is not remarkable that the superstitious Mexicans should have come to believe in the evil influences of the place.

But about the middle of January, 1899, a passing traveller

found the waters of the lake much lowered, with no quicksands in sight. More than that, a fresh breeze drove the blue water breaking upon the shore, and his horse manifested no reluctance to drink freely. Grouse drummed in the thickets, deer fed in the chaparral, and it was as if an evil spell had suddenly been lifted from the place. The traveller told of these things in Taos, and his report was speedily corroborated, but the lake continued to be known by its ill-omened name.

The superintendent rode around this mysterious sheet of water, explored the hills near by and meditated deeply for some hours. Then he returned to Santa Fé and to New York, with the air of a man who has accomplished his mission. His first act after returning was to re-read the dead man's statement:

"My real name is Paul Zphanoff," it ran, "and I am of Polish birth. My father was killed in the Polish insurrection of 1846; one of my brothers was accused of the distribution of Socialistic literature, and died in the mercury mines; my other brother disappeared in the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul on a similar charge, and his fate was never known. My mother died soon after this. It is not wonderful, then, that I should have grown up with the fever of revolution in my veins.

"In 1872 I fled from Russia to France, where I began my scientific studies at the University of Paris. Very soon I ran short of money, and continued so for many years, living among the poor, for all my funds were expended in apparatus and experiments. But I shall never cease to be thankful for those years, for I grew to know the poor. I saw the hideous industrial despotism as the slaves see it, only one degree less than that of the Tsar, and that which had made me a Nihilist in Russia made me a Socialist in Paris.

"Four years later came my arrest, on an absurd charge, but leading to a year's imprisonment. I shall not dwell upon this outrage, for it has been amply evenged. It was the one thing needed to precipitate my resolution, and when I was released I joined hands with the Committee of the Red Terror.

"Then, in 1876, I made my grand discovery — the discovery which has resulted in making me the most powerful and irresponsible ruler that the century has seen. The police will remember, if no one else does, the sudden disappearance from half a dozen

capitals of a hundred of the most dangerous and most suspected labor agitators and socialists of Europe. They had departed with me, and we had gone to realize the ideal of centuries of dreamers — an industrial and ungoverned community. But for its success we had conditions of isolation impossible heretofore.

"That was due entirely to my invention. Briefly speaking, it was based on an extension of the wave theory of force. Every one knows that matter in a comparatively low rate of molecular vibration produces sound, running up the gamut, till, after an interval of silence, heat and light rays are produced. Beyond the violet of the spectrum lie the Röntgen rays, and beyond this nothing has been known, chiefly on account of the impossibility of producing a sufficiently rapid rate of vibration. This difficulty I overcame by the use of my multiplying electric motors, and beyond the violet of the prism, further than the Röntgen discoveries, I found what I have termed the 'Hypnotic Ray.'

"To these currents are due, I believe, all the phenomena of telepathy, hypnotism and mesmerism. Hitherto all these forces have been quite uncontrollable, generated no one knew how, but for the first time I was able to produce them mechanically at will, and even to transmit them by means of suitably contrived conductors as easily as an ordinary voltage of electricity. To this the Invisible City owned its being.

"In an almost unknown valley in the mountains of New Mexico we chose our site, at the bottom of a deep, green, circular valley. Round about it we led the Hypnotic wires, with revolving discs at intervals, so that neither man nor beast was able to come within sight of them without falling under their influence, and being made by the operation of my will to believe that they saw the valley filled with water, while our colony was establishing itself within. There were but a few score of us at first, but we obtained accessions from all quarters, till, at the end of a year, the valley contained more than five hundred inhabitants.

"We had taken a vow of individual poverty as austere as that of the Capuchins — but to me was the power, to me was the glory. I alone knew the secret of the Hypnotic motors, and every soul in the place was blindly and unconsciously under my influence. Not one was able to pass outside the lines while the wires were

charged, and the machines were never stopped. Meanwhile we increased in numbers and in collective wealth, for we had set about extensive mining operations and daily took out an average of five thousand dollars' worth of gold dust. A scientifically cultivated zone of land supplied all our own needs, and the proceeds of our mine were devoted to the cause of Socialism and Anarchy. I alone went into the outer world from time to time to sell the gold and apply the money where it was the most needed.

"Frequently emissaries were dispatched outside on special service, but not one of these ever returned. They were invariably caused to lose all memory of the city on departing, remembering only the blind purpose with which I had inspired them. Ravachol was one of these — Lucchini, the slayer of the Austrian Empress, was among the latest. Whenever a king has been shot at or a millionaire assassinated during the last ten years it has been at my order, and as surely by my hand as if I myself had held the weapon.

"The city continued to grow, even beyond my expectations, and in 1889 was already densely populated. Ten years later, indeed, it contained upwards of ninety thousand toilers — nearly a hundred thousand automata. Frequently I made journeys to recruit new settlers, as well as to spy upon the machinations of our enemy, the World. I became well known in the business and social circles of four capitals, and it was upon one of these expeditions that I was so ill-starred as to meet Marie Lorrime.

"She was the daughter of a multifold millionaire, a man against whom all our hostility was directed, but I found myself loving her from the first. I struggled hard, I went back to the Invisible City, I worked, I plotted, I cursed, but I could not tear the love out of my soul. I had never known the like before; here was something absolutely beyond my control. To love meant desertion to the enemy, and treachery of the most dastardly kind to the cause of liberty. For a year I did not go within five hundred miles of her, and I devoted myself fiercely to the grim business of dynamite and stilleto, as half a dozen nations know to their cost.

"All was in vain. I was as completely enchanted as were the deluded victims of my powers. Strangely enough, to exercise these powers upon her I felt to be impossible. Yet I did not even

know whether she had so much as dreamed of loving me, nor did I much care. Such love as mine, I knew well, was not to be baulked by a mere woman's will. It was with my own will that the battle lay.

"There is no need to detail my struggles — they lasted for three years, and at last I gave up the unequal conflict. It was in the Invisible City, late at night, I remember, that I at last admitted defeat, and, once conquered, I made immediate preparations to open my new career and completely close the old. Human life, I am glad to say, has never weighed much with me. Our immense water reservoir was situated on the hillside just above the city, and by night I employed myself secretly in weakening the gates. I also labored to turn the half dry course of a river that a cloud-burst always changed to a roaring torrent, and to deflect it toward the reservoir. The valley would fill like a cup with the next cloud-burst, and not a man could pass the lines, even under fear of death. For myself, the only danger was that which always menaced me in leaving the city, — that the grounded Hypnotic wires should make the earth circuit to my body — for the constant neighborhood of the strange psycho-physical currents had produced an effect somewhat akin to polarization — to avoid a technical explanation. As a safeguard I wore a complete garment of woven glass, manufactured by our own processes and flexible as cloth.

"On the third of January, 1899, I secured what gold happened to be in the treasury, and left the Invisible City for the last time. I went straight to New York, where I exchanged the dust for thousand dollar bills."

At this point the narrative broke off abruptly, ended by the death of the mysterious writer. What was the true cause of his strange paralytic seizure? Had the wonderful "Hypnotic Ray" found him out, and avenged upon him the murder of a hundred thousand people?

No one will ever know. And meanwhile the Invisible City rests at peace beneath the blue water of the Lake of Demons — invisible forever.

The Strayed Finger.*

BY JOHN WALCOTT.

R. WILKINSON was not only a very susceptible young man, but his sense of propriety was so keen that when, on an important occasion, he presented his betrothed with a jewel-case which he supposed to contain a pearl necklace, and it turned out to enclose a woman's finger, his horror was hardly greater than his sense of the indecorum of the circumstance. The lady shared his feelings. After the cold water had brought her to, she informed him, with even more firmness than sorrow, that she would never see him again until she had received from him in writing a proper explanation of the deplorable incident. Mr. Wilkinson was grieved at her decision. Nevertheless, he could but admire her for it. Having ascertained that she did not suspect him of direct complicity in the unpleasant occurrence, he went away without remonstrance, carrying with him the uncanny object still in its delicate silk-lined receptacle. The name on the case was that of the prominent jeweller from whom the necklace had been ordered.

Mr. Wilkinson was not a man to be carried away by passion, but he was determined to bring to justice the perpetrator of the trick — for he had no doubt that a cruel and ghastly jest had been played upon him and his fiancée — and he knew that blind anger would not help him to this end. So he immediately took a cab and gave the address of a private detective whom he had met professionally and felt he could trust. To put the matter into the hands of the police would be to court instant publicity. The press would take hold of it, and a swarm of reporters would gather, like flies upon carrion, to his own annoyance and, what was much more important, to the great discomfort of his Mary. The detective was out, and after a few moments' hesitation Mr. Wilkinson went home, where he passed a sleepless night.

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The more he thought of the thing, the less possible it seemed to him that it could have happened. Thrice within the first hour or two he rose from his bed, turned up the light and examined the gruesome contents of the case. The first time he half expected to find that the necklace was there; the second that there was nothing there; the third, that the finger was some clever imitation — and thrice he was disappointed. The finger was there, and it was a finger — the ring finger of the left hand, he decided. It was a small, delicate member, with something curious in its formation, and yet offering a shadowy suggestion of youth and prettiness which grated horribly upon the young man's nerves. It might have been one of Mary's fingers.

The incident was unwelcome and incomprehensible, but none the less real. It had actually happened, and, of all persons, happened to him! To have come a respectable road to within gunshot of forty and wedlock only to be wound, as it were, around an unknown woman's detached finger was hard — very hard. Mr. Wilkinson began to entertain a grudge against this strange and fragmentary intruder. It had taken an unfair advantage of an unoffending person. He rose once more and placed it under a table in the farthest corner of the room. This act left his mind free for the moment to consider in a less prejudiced way that it was the sender of the object, rather than the object itself, that called for rigorous treatment. He prepared him a table in the presence of his enemies, and for the time ate with gusto from the dish of their imagined discomfiture. Only he did not know who they were. He could think of no enemy who would be likely to sacrifice a charming portion of wife or sister to cause him temporary chagrin. The sudden suspicion that this might be a memento of some less reputable person filled him with disquiet. If it should be — if Mary should find. . . . He became again dissatisfied with the present situation of the offending member. From its remote obscurity it appeared to his imagination to be pointing at him ironically, like some disagreeably incarnated finger of fate. A feeling of shame, such as he had never known before, began to creep and curdle in his blood.

Morning came at last, and breakfast, which still lay untasted before the pondering Wilkinson when the detective was shown in.

He listened with much interest to his client's story, looked at the finger and its case, and passed judgment on the whole affair in a word of one syllable. Further, he recommended that the business be turned over to him, including the package in which the finger had come — the case, which he unpleasantly referred to as the casket — and the wrapper, which Wilkinson had had the presence of mind to save. Armed with these he set out, promising to report in the evening.

Mr. Wilkinson was not mistaken in his man. Night had hardly fallen when the detective reappeared and offered the following satisfactory explanation of the curious incident:

"At 4.30 yesterday afternoon, Mr. Wilkinson," he began, "a man called upon you at your office. He looked seedy, but on the whole respectable, and you found it impossible not to listen to him on account of his melting eye and rich, sympathetic voice."

Mr. Wilkinson nodded. He was not so simple as to wonder how the detective knew this, but he did wonder what it had to do with the case.

"He said," proceeded the detective, "that he was poor but — and-so-forth, a stranger in town, looking for a job, anything honest." The detective paused here and smiled pleasantly. "Had found a chance as waiter at Royce's, but must provide his own waiter's coat, price three dollars. Could you — and-so-forth? You couldn't; you weren't quite so easy. But you did the next best thing — gave him an order on your haberdasher for a waiter's coat. Wrote it on the face of one of your envelopes, and gave him one of your visiting cards. He got the coat on your order and then went to his uncle's and cashed in the coat. It only fetched a dollar, but every little helps."

The detective paused again and looked attentively at Mr. Wilkinson, who did not quite like his expression.

"Very well, sir," he said, somewhat testily, "what of it?"

"This. When uncle came to examine the coat at his leisure, he found two rather unaccountable articles in it — your card and a woman's finger. He felt surprised, naturally, and a little grieved."

"I can understand that," said Mr. Wilkinson, appreciatively.

"In fact," resumed the detective, "the thing upset him considerably. A poco deals, sooner or later, in a great many shady arti-

cles, but he has to draw the line somewhere. Uncle had never had any call for odd fingers — worried him to have the thing in his place. So what does he do but stow the article in a jewel-case he had handy, and send it off to the address on your card?"

"I see," said Mr. Wilkinson, with a sigh of relief. The thing appeared to be straightening itself out admirably. "You have proof of these statements?"

The detective nodded.

"Then there is little more to be said, I should think. I am greatly obliged for your services. What do I owe you?"

The detective rubbed his chin. He looked somewhat disappointed.

"Of course," he said, thoughtfully, "if that is all you want to know it is no affair of mine. Twenty-five dollars."

Mr. Wilkinson did not like to feel that he had said or done less than might be required of a man in his position. He hastened to inquire what the detective meant.

"Well, Mr. Wilkinson," he said, "there are three questions which, I should have said, would suggest themselves to a man of your inquiring turn of mind. First, what became of the necklace, which was sent from your jeweller's by one of their uniformed employés yesterday afternoon, and which should have reached you, as you expected, about the time you received the little souvenir from uncle? Second, how did the finger get into the excellent company of your visiting card, in a pocket of the waiter's coat? Third, to whom did the finger originally belong?"

"Very true," said Mr. Wilkinson, beginning to be a little ashamed of his premature satisfaction. The fact was, he had been thinking of Mary, and the explanation he had already received seemed ample for his purpose. "Do you know the answers to these questions?"

"I do," the detective replied, "but I should prefer to have you hear the story from another person. He is due here now." Almost as he spoke the bell rang and a young man was shown in, whom the detective introduced as Mr. Blackall. The visitor appeared somewhat ill at ease at first, but presently his manner grew more easy, and at Mr. Wilkinson's request he proceeded to tell his story, in a manly, straightforward manner.

"I am an utter stranger to you, Mr. Wilkinson," he began, "but if you were to ask any one who knows me, you would be told that I have always borne a reputation for honesty. Yesterday, nevertheless, I was guilty of a forgery and two thefts. One of these offences was deliberate, the other two being forced upon me, as it seemed, by the urgency of circumstances."

He paused and shook his head in a melancholy way, but Mr. Wilkinson, who felt much attracted by his manner, urged him to go on.

"Yes, I am a robber, Mr. Wilkinson. Last evening, at half-past six, I stationed myself on your front steps and stole from the messenger's hand a package addressed to you and containing in a jewel-case a pearl necklace."

Mr. Wilkinson was startled. He felt somewhat less strongly attracted toward his visitor, but still encouraged him to continue.

"You will wonder why I did this," he went on, "when I tell you that I am a man of good family and independent fortune. I had no possible use for your necklace, which is now in this gentleman's hands and at your disposal."

"What were you after, then?" cried Mr. Wilkinson, much puzzled.

"A woman's finger," replied Mr. Blackall. Mr. Wilkinson's astonishment increased. "I had lost it and was very anxious to recover it, for a particular reason. You will think it a trifle to make so much trouble about, but it happened to be very important to me at the moment. I had carelessly dropped it in the street, in taking out my handkerchief. When I discovered my loss some moments later, and retraced my steps to look for the finger, I came upon a shabby person in the act of picking it up. He seemed embarrassed when he discovered what it was, but instead of dropping it, he hastily secreted it in the pocket of a coat which he carried upon his arm. I naturally followed him to see where he was going with my property, which, for obvious reasons, I could not openly claim.

"When he entered the shop of Mr. Isaacson, I applied my face to the window and saw the wretch exchange the coat he carried — which I had no doubt he had stolen — for a few paltry coins. I would rather have given twenty times the sum than lose the valu-

able article he had disposed of so carelessly, and I had much ado to keep my hands off of him when he came out. Prudence prevailed, however; I let him pass and turned to watch the pawnbroker, who had carelessly thrown the coat upon his counter. In a few minutes, his other customers having left the shop, he proceeded to make a systematic examination of the garment, turning the pockets inside out. I saw him start when he touched my finger, which fell upon the counter with a scrap of paper or card. A sudden impulse urged me to act, and with a half-defined purpose of recovering my property on the spot I entered the shop.

"At the sound of the opening door I saw him sweep the finger behind the counter and, as I supposed, into a drawer. As I approached him it occurred to me that it would be even more foolish and unsafe to connect myself in his mind with the article I sought than it would have been to make a confidant of the tramp, and so, on the impulse of the moment, I merely took out my watch and laid it before him, saying, 'How much?'

"The pawnbroker took the watch nearer the window for better examination, and I instinctively seized the opportunity to inspect the card that had fallen from the coat with the finger and remained upon the counter. It was yours, Mr. Wilkinson, and I impressed the address on my memory.

"Then Isaacson turned toward me and offered a loan on my watch which, fortunately, was so absurdly small that I could consistently refuse it, and I left the shop, feeling very foolish and at a loss just what to do. I was loth to relinquish my finger, and when outside paused and took another look at its chance possessor. He was staring steadfastly at the card I had just read, now and then shaking his head in an undecided way. In a moment, however, he seemed to reach a decision. From a shelf he took a small oblong morocco-covered box — a jewel-case, apparently — and into it put some object which he slipped from under the counter. I could not see what it was, but had very little doubt about it. He wrapped and sealed the box, and it was his action in addressing the parcel that interested me most, for he obviously copied the address from the card that had dropped with the finger from the coat.

"Presently he came out, package in hand, and made his way,

with me in his wake, to a District Messenger office in the next block. I only stopped to make sure that he left the parcel there for delivery, and then started for your house. I determined to be here before the package and to recover my property by making a direct appeal to your magnanimity. While one could not think of putting himself, even in a small way, into the hands of a pawnbroker, with a gentleman there could be no question of the result. And yet, when I had ascended your steps and was about to ring, I was seized with a qualm of diffidence and confusion. What excuse could I make for intruding upon a gentleman on such an errand. Could I say, 'Mr. Wilkinson, my name is Blackall. There is a finger coming to you by special messenger which belongs to me!' Clearly not.

"I thought of several elaborate and roundabout ways of introducing the subject, but none of them appealed to me as quite adequate. I had arrived at no conclusion when a uniformed messenger appeared at the foot of the steps, evidently looking for the number on the transom. Instinctively, I drew back into the shade. I was standing in the vestibule between the outer and inner doors, and the cross-light from the gas in your hall and the electric light outside made a triangle of shadow in which I was invisible to the boy, while his every motion was plain to me. He took from beneath his coat a small oblong package. That decided me upon an instant plan of action. My soft hat I doubled and thrust into a pocket. The lad came leisurely up the steps, his attention fixed upon the address on the parcel, making sure that he had the right house. Calmly I stepped forth, bareheaded, partially closing the outer door. The boy looked up and said: 'Mr. Wilkinson?'

"'Correct,' I answered, eagerly extending my hand for the coveted parcel. With it I was handed a receipt book and asked to sign. Of course, there was no help for it, and forgery was added to my offences.

"In a short half-hour I was safe in my lodgings, free to unwrap the article that had caused me so much anxiety and effort. Imagine my consternation when, on opening the case, I found, instead of the object of my search, a pearl necklace. For some time I sat and stared at it, as ridiculously confused as a clown in a

Christmas pantomime. The case was, apparently, the one I had seen Isaacson use, but the contents! Surely pawnbrokers did not keep pearl necklaces lying loose under their counters. And, if they did, they would scarcely send them off at random to addresses accidentally found in pledged articles of clothing! The more I thought of it the more unaccountable it seemed. Certainly there was but one thing to do. I had got into deep waters and needed an experienced hand and head to get me out. I went at once to a private detective whom I knew and made a clean breast of the matter. I assured him that it was hardly less important that the necklace should be restored, with some reasonable excuse, to the rightful owner than that my lost finger should be recovered. He agreed to attend promptly to both matters. And he has." Mr. Blackall bowed in the direction of the detective, who returned the compliment and said:

"Fact is, Mr. Wilkinson, I was looking up the case from Mr. Blackall's end when you called on me last night, and when you told me your story this morning I, of course, made my own deductions. The two mysteries just dovetailed into each other, you see, so that I had an easy job for my money. And now let me restore to you gentlemen the missing articles, which, I dare say, you would neither of you care to exchange again."

The detective smiled, and produced from nowhere in particular two jewel-cases. They were much alike and were marked with the name of the same jeweller.

"Well, Mr. Wilkinson," said Mr. Blackall, "glad to have met you, but sorry to have caused you so much inconvenience. I trust you appreciate my delicate position and the overpowering considerations which prevailed upon me to do a dishonorable thing." He offered his hand, which Mr. Wilkinson did not appear to see.

"You will excuse me, Mr. Blackall," he said, with dignity, "if, before I commit myself to complete acquiescence, I request some explanation of the manner in which this strange — er — article — came into your possession."

Mr. Blackall smiled.

"Certainly, my dear sir — but I thought I had made myself plain in the matter. Have I not?" He addressed the detective, who shook his head.

"Then I shall be glad to do so. You will recall that I pleaded guilty to two thefts yesterday. The first article stolen was the finger. I had long coveted such a finger, and when the chance came to acquire one I was not strong enough to resist the temptation. So I stole it."

Mr. Wilkinson shuddered. He had a momentary vision of a young girl going about in search of the third finger of her left hand.

"Whose was it?" he asked, involuntarily.

Mr. Blackall shook his head.

"I don't know, I'm sure," he said. "Bad lot, I dare say, but as pretty a subject for dissection as I ever saw."

Dissection! Mr. Wilkinson breathed more freely. An incubus of horror was lifted from his brain, and he was relieved to feel nothing more than a mild disgust.

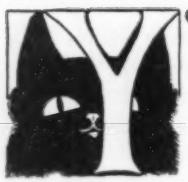
"Ah," he said, "you are —"

"A student of surgery — didn't I say?" replied Mr. Blackall. "Recently I have been making a special study of the structure of the hand. Yesterday, in the dissecting room, I happened upon this finger — a very remarkable specimen. You will readily notice the peculiar form of the tendon; it is double." He drew the finger from the jewel-case and by means of his thumb and forefinger manipulated the tendon so that the member moved unpleasantly. "There are," he continued, complacently, "so far as I know, extremely few cases of this kind on record. I can hardly tell you what an attraction it had for me. I resolved, before communicating my discovery to the demonstrator, to take it home with me, and spend the night with it. Instead of which, Mr. Wilkinson," he concluded — and here he and the detective both smiled — "it was you who— "

"Yes," said Mr. Wilkinson, "I certainly did."

The Man who Found Zero.*

BY ION ARNOLD.



"YOU are my prisoner!" Instantly the glass was dashed from Heston's lips. A strong hand was upon him. He turned and looked up. It was the Professor.

"Follow me!" he commanded, sternly. Heston arose and followed, trembling.

In the dim laboratory the great scientist turned and faced his pupil. He took from rigid fingers the sheet whereon Heston had scrawled a farewell to the world, glanced at it and tore it up. Then the strong face uplifted and a piercing gleam shot through the shaggy brows. The youth who had not feared to face death cowered before it.

"Heston," he said, "I knew, when you received word of your father's bankruptcy that you considered your scientific career at an end — that you are too proud to go on through charity and without genius to win a scholarship. I happened to learn that, with prospects swept away, you have released from her engagement the only woman in the world to you. I saw you steal to that cabinet, and I followed. I looked for the third bottle from the end, the blue vial containing the deadliest alkaloid known to science. You poured out enough for a regiment. You were determined to die. I know your temperament — nothing will stop you.

"All this sounds brutal, but listen. Since you are determined to die, I am going to help you. You shall make yourself blest instead of cursed of men — an immortal. You shall die like a gentleman and a scientist, and science shall bless you. I am going to send you in search of absolute zero!"

Heston nodded, shuddering slightly, and tried to steady his thoughts as he followed the Professor up a flight of winding stairs to an apartment where none had ever been admitted.

"Absolute zero!" he thought; "that point of cold where all molecular motion ceases — 460 degrees below zero, Fahrenheit!"

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Compared to such a temperature, he was now breathing white-hot flame. If creatures from some distant planet of that temperature should visit earth, they would be burned to a cinder in the normal heat of a room. If they touched ice, it would sear their flesh like a brand-iron. If they fell into the crevasse on an Alpine glacier, it would be as if earth-dwellers fell into the seething crater of Vesuvius. Think how ten degrees warmer makes one throw off his outer garments, and ten degrees colder makes one shudder with a chill. Think, now, of four hundred degrees hotter! A man would be reduced to a cinder! Four hundred degrees colder — he would become brittle as a pipe-stem!

A touch of a button by the Professor, and the room was alight. Heston stood silent. Never had he been in so strange a place. In the centre of the chamber, directly beneath the great skylight through which the star-beams played, there stood the strangest mechanism ever beheld by man. It consisted of three globes, one within another, resting on an aluminum engine, as to whose workings the student had no clue and could not hazard a guess. The globes were of crystal clearness. At the upper end of the inner shell, which was of oblong shape, lay a swansdown pillow of lightest silk — at the lower end was a contrivance concerning whose use he could but wonder. He studied it, fascinated, but trembling.

"Behold at once your glory and your grave!" It was the great scientist who spoke, and his voice was the voice of doom — his face like a death-mask cut in solid phosphorus. "In that combination of bulbs, Heston, you are going on a journey that no man has ever travelled. You will make a record of your trip to that remote realm, for you are to be shot upward to the very frontier of our atmosphere — to the threshold of space — sixty miles straight over our heads this minute. There you will find absolute zero. No man has ever seen or recorded it, but science has demonstrated it — and it remains for you to find it!

"The two outer bulbs enclosing your crystal sepulchre are perfect vacuums. They will shut out all cold, all heat, all sound. Without those vacuum shrouds, sir, you could not ascend ten miles without being frozen into a pillar of ice. But in that inner bulb, protected so, you may penetrate the realm of absolute zero, warmed by the latent heat of your body. Below is an aluminum engine,

run by liquid air, with an energy sufficient and a reservoir large enough for your entire journey. At first your flight will be very swift on account of the density of the lower atmosphere, but your later journey will be slower. When you have reached a temperature corresponding to that of liquid air, so that exterior heat no longer makes the liquid air boil and give off power, an automatic arrangement will start an electrical heating current in vacuo, and you will proceed as before. You will make profuse notes of every sensation and experience. When you reach the frontier of space you will be suspended till the last drop of your propelling power has been exhausted, when you will fall.

"Ah, you shudder, and I do not marvel. Falling from such a height, both you and your machine would simply burst to atoms midway on the home journey. But again I provide for the contingency. The moment the engine stops, an automatic arrangement releases it from you. Instantly from beneath your crystal prison-house there will shoot out a hundred silken-like but immensely strong parachutes, flying upward and suspending you from a hundred delicate but unbreakable strands. Your initial fall will be about four miles a second, gradually decreasing until you reach the earth, sinking as lightly as a feather to your destination. Now, sir, this is all theoretical. I have worked it out to a hair's-breadth by the aid of differential calculus; but there is always the unknown equation. I assure you that you will reach the border-land of space; of your safe return there is one chance in a million. Will you freely go?"

"I only regret that there is that one chance of a return!" replied Heston.

The cold scientist caught the boy in his arms in rapture.

"You *are* a brave lad, after all," he said with faltering voice. "Sit while I bring you your last supper. You are about to enter upon a long fast, and you need all your strength. You must eat. Heston dropped upon a hard bench, staring past that wonderful life-boat or death-cage, destined for the unknown, up through starry space, his soul on fire, his brow chill with sweat-drops. What a magnificent ending! What a contrast to the shabby exit he had all but accomplished! He sat benumbed.

When the Professor returned with a well-laden basket of food

he gave but one command, "Eat!" Then he turned his whole attention to filling the reservoir of the liquid-air engine and making cautious tests. Five large copper tanks, from which cold vapor fumed and curled downward toward the floor, he brought from an elaborate liquefier connected with the basement dynamo.

But Heston did not touch a mouthful. He simply could not.

"Disrobe!" ordered the savant. The student obeyed, and the Professor produced a strange suit, of the finest web silk, padded thick with swansdown. This feather armor fitted like a glove.

"Take these sheets of parchment and this indelible pencil. Write down everything. Let nothing escape your observation. Watch the barometer on your left and the mercury, alcohol and hydrogen thermometers outside the outer bulb. Now fold your arms. Are you ready?"

Deftly and gently the young man was pushed, head foremost, into his crystal dungeon, and a mechanism was set in motion that was to fill the living tomb with an invisible spray of ozone.

"Good-bye, lad," murmured the Professor, in a voice not without emotion, "I pray to God that we meet again!" but the tone said plainly, "Never!"

The door closed softly upon Heston's living sepulchre, and by the turn of a lever was hermetically sealed. The sudden silence filled him with a strange terror. He saw the Professor moving about, saw his lips move as he rolled back the great skylight, but not a sound nor a vibration penetrated his vacuum coat-of-mail. He was cut off from the world by two walls of nothingness. A delicious breath, like mountain-pine odors, enveloped and refreshed him. He closed his eyes in peaceful resignation. What an exqusite way to die!

"My God!" he cried. There had been a whirr, a throb, a shudder, neither felt nor heard, but he was off! With widened eyes he caught a glimpse of the Professor, his countenance ablaze with triumphant joy, waving a last farewell. Faster, faster, faster! Through the roof of the university dome he sailed like a disembodied spirit, swifter, lighter, with the stars seeming about to fall upon him. He turned his head. Now faded the lights of the great city, dwindling away to a confused blot, the immense blank curve of the horizon lost in a vague blend of clouds. But the

stars — how glorious, how more than bright they seemed! There was not a breath of air to swerve him from his upward course, not the slightest tilting motion — yet now he knew a peculiar whirr which he could feel but could not hear. Up and up and up, faster, still faster, through night and silence he was borne — like a lost soul doomed to wander endlessly through space he flew — a willing suicide, alone with God! He lay limp and quivering. Was this death?

Heston passed into a state of semi-consciousness, but when he woke the sickness and the terror were gone, and he lay calmly in his armor of down. The rich, life-giving ozone penetrated his vitals as a potent drug, reviving him, snatching him, it seemed, from annihilation. No longer the silence haunted, no more the darkness, loneliness, helplessness of his position benumbed him. Through the curving domes of his crystal palace and grave he gazed upon the planets, as if journeying directly into their glorious midst, there to choose a home through all eternity. An intoxication of hope and triumph informed him. The shame, the sorrow, the defeat, the guilt of conscience, were gone. He seemed to have sloughed off all mortal anguish and sensibility to pain as he had laid aside his garments on leaving the haunts of men. The majesty of night, the immensity of the firmament, the glory and perfection of the great Creator of it all — never had their realization so overwhelmed him. At times he seemed sublimated, inspired. No longer was he the accursed worm of the earth. He was one with the stars, the invisible ether, the potent Ego of divinity, coeval with Nature and the Infinite.

He knew that, passing upward at his present stupendous rate, he had already reached a height beyond that ever attained by man. Even this little victory seemed to challenge the ages. On, on, on! He could not travel fast enough to suit the passion now. What though the penalty of it all were death? It would not be the ignoble death he had sought — it would be indeed the scientist's, the soldier's, the king's! His Mentor, far from being a remorseless tyrant, now appeared in the light of a benefactor. He closed his eyes in thankful ecstasy and slept!

When Heston awoke from his slumber it was dazzling sunlight. And such a dawn! Up from the east there shot great floods of

scarlet light — throbbing, quivering, unspeakably glorious. He seemed to be borne aloft through an infinitude of flame. With difficulty turning his head to the proper angle, he caught sight of the great circular blot of the earth, half obscured in fan-shaped stretches of purple and gold. The whirring shudder beneath him was now three times faster than when he fell asleep. The resistance of the atmosphere was less and less and his progress slower, though the engines were working to their fullest capacity. He scanned the thermometers outside. The one containing mercury had burst its bulb. The alcohol in the other had frozen to a yellowish icicle. He turned breathlessly to the barometer. It no longer gave any record. Then at last he consulted the hydrogen thermometer. It registered 246 degrees below zero! His flight had been faster, even, than the scientist's calculations had foretold. He had already covered more than half his upward journey.

Remembering his promise to his accomplice in suicide, he took up the parchment and pencil and began to write. But, like one who arrives in some region hitherto unexplored by man, he found so much to say, and yet so little that he could put into words. Line upon line, in closely-written, terse and teeming language, he recorded as intelligibly as possible his amazing experience, wondering if the words would ever reach a human eye. Often he was compelled to rest, for there was barely room for the movement of his arms, and the brightness of the day stung him to partial blindness. Often he shielded his lids with the parchment sheets.

He felt calmer now, and wished that he had eaten or had food, that he might be sure to live — live to prolong the delicious agony of his unique suicide. Interest in his surroundings compounded, and inspired him. He studied himself no less critically than the vast depths of crimson nothingness that lost him as a meteor plunging out of illimitable space toward the great bosom of the sun, to feed it. He felt colossal in vanity — an atom in reality. His thoughts reverted to the events of the past few days, to his lost home, to the calamities that had crowded upon him — to Her. Would she ever know his fate? How soon would there be a commotion over his disappearance, as sudden and complete as if, on some mountain pinnacle, he had burst to atoms and been blown back to his primeval dust? He knew that one, at least, far down

below, where it was yet gray dawn, sat with eagle orb pressed to the eyepiece of the great university refractor, scanning the zenith, and very likely, as the sun's rays glistened upon his crystal coffin, watched his progress, trembling more for the success of a stupendous experiment than for the fate of its probable victim.

As the sun mounted higher its brilliancy became crucial. It was with difficulty that Heston could make the merest notes, covering his face with his hands continually, the parchment over them. Nevertheless, in that rarefied atmosphere, it seemed that the sun pierced them like X-rays, although its heat could not penetrate the vacuum bulbs in which he was inclosed any more than could the cold. Often he thought he saw the very interior workings of his hand laid over his eyes, so sharp was the light — the bones, the sinews and the ruby blood coursing the veins.

Then came a long lapse into unconsciousness. The intense glare of the almost vertical rays, the faintness of hunger and the strain of an abnormal attitude, both physical and mental, combined to induce a deep lethargy, from which the voyager into unknown regions waked to find the sun low in the west, having passed him like a white-hot projectile shot out of space, curving over earth into space again. Its brilliancy was waning, and he rallied from his stupor. He noted his environment and the slower throb of the engine. Manifestly, he was going at a vastly diminished speed. Already the world he had left was claiming him again, and the mass of 260,000,000,000 cubic miles of solid earth and water beneath was exerting upon his frail shell the irresistible attraction of gravitation, applying an invisible brake to his extraordinary vehicle.

The blue of the sky overhead had deepened to indigo, a mantle of purple and gold dimming the west, where the sunset was even more glorious than the daybreak had been. One by one the stars sprang out of the deep blue vault, more brilliant, more dazzlingly beautiful, with now and then a shooting meteor that, bombarded out of space, seemed to come alarmingly near the rash intruder into these great altitudes, trailing across his pathway an avalanche of effulgent meteoric dust.

There stood Jupiter, monarch of the planets, all his five moons perfectly visible to the naked eye. Far to the eastward blazed

Saturn with his triple belts, no longer a mere speck, but like a lamp of glory hung aloft in a cathedral dome, with Mars opposed, never so crimson, with its wondrous tracery of canals and mountain ranges, revealed to the awed observer as through a powerful glass. He no longer wondered that astronomers seek high places — for could man's greatest telescope be raised to such a height the mysteries of the heavens would be mysteries no more.

Heston's sense of feeling, now rendered extremely acute by hours of absolute silence and deprivation of hearing, assured him, by the feeble beating of the engine, that for a long time he had been going upward through the sunset with a slowness as extreme as had been the velocity with which he had darted up through the dawn, and that he must now be nearing his goal. He looked at the hydrogen thermometer. It no longer recorded temperature, which meant that he had attained a height where the cold was more than 340 degrees below zero, and that the engine was working upon artificial electrical heat in a vacuum, having passed the point where liquid air ceases to give off power.

Even as he looked at the frozen hydrogen he felt a trembling movement beneath him. His heart leaped. That dying shudder meant that the last drop of liquid air was gone, and he had reached his journey's end!

He gazed upward. The spectacle was overwhelming. Every star shone out with thrilling brilliancy. For a long moment he seemed suspended there, pushed up to the very summit of the dome of atmosphere. A vast, swirling, convolving cloud of vaporous blue filled all the heavenly vault. Beyond it he saw, as if it were indeed a wall, the realm of solid oxygen, life-giver of the world, enclosing the earth in a transparent, moving cerulean shell. Beyond that lay the immensity of space.

Yes, for one single instant Robert Heston gazed upon that which no mortal had ever seen at close range — but hardly was he convinced of the triumphant termination of his journey than he felt the engine suddenly disengage itself from his prison, felt a terrific sense of falling — falling faster than ever man or god has fallen since Vulcan was cast from heaven into the sea! He quivered, struggled, gasped — realizing that the end had come. Then he remembered that he must write! But who could record the